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ABSTRACT

A review was conducted to assess early initiatives by Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) prime sponsors in knowledge development under the Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act of 1977. The review was based on two waves of site visits to a total of 19 prime sponsors, in May-June, 1979, and in November-January, 1979-80. From the data gathered, most of the knowledge development activity was found to be at an early stage of development, or else it was not developed at all. In many cases, the evaluators found that sponsors lacked any clear conception of what knowledge development was supposed to be: activity of one sort or another was aimed at satisfying what seemed to both regional staff and state and local prime sponsors an extremely nebulous goal. Despite limited progress, however, the average prime sponsor was found to be interested in learning more about its youth programs so that they could be improved, and would welcome advice, examples, and technical assistance in any form in which it might be offered. It was recommended that (1) some firm definition of knowledge development as applicable to youth programs at the state and local level be provided; (2) that prime sponsors be given help in designing evaluation plans that are within the realm of accomplishment and that may reasonably be expected to provide knowledge useful to them; and (3) that technical assistance be provided to the prime sponsors. (KC)

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A REPORT ON LOCAL KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT:

INITIATIVES, THEMES AND APPROACHES UNDER THE

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS ACT (YEDPA)

[Grant No. 28-37-79-02.]

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I. Introduction and Overview

This report summarizes work done over a period of 14 months reviewing early initiatives by CETA prime sponsors in Knowledge Development under the Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act of 1977. It is based primarily on two waves of site visits to a total of 19 prime sponsors[1] -- the first wave in the months of May-June, 1979, and the second wave in the months of November-January, 1979-80.

In the spring of 1979, prior to these site visits, MDC central staff had looked in on the 10 Department of Labor regional offices. Our objectives were, first, to get a feeling for regional staff attitudes toward Knowledge Development, and second to get a list of those prime sponsors most likely to have active Knowledge Development initiatives. We also established contact with Osoro and Associates, a private firm which had contracted with OYP to conduct a series of conferences to provide local prime sponsors with training in Knowledge Development techniques. From our visits with the regional offices and Osoro, we compiled a roster of 62 nominations.

Based on this information, MDC engaged faculty of the School of Public Administration at North Carolina Central University to develop project abstracts, via telephone calls, of the most likely sounding

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[1]Richmond, California; San Francisco, California; Escambia County, Florida; Montgomery, Alabama; Chicago, Illinois; Dennison, Texas; Corpus Christi, Texas; San Antonio, Texas; Clark County, Washington; St. Louis, Missouri; Montana B-O-S; Wayne County, Michigan; Clackamas County, Oregon; Yakima, Washington; Fayette, Pennsylvania; Dallas, Texas; Atlanta, Georgia; Penobscot, Maine; Jackson-Josephine, Oregon.

Knowledge Development initiatives. From these 25 abstracts, 19 sites were chosen for two-day visits by MDC staff and field research associates.

This report, then, is based largely on information gained by brief site visits to prime sponsorships believed to have somewhat advanced Knowledge Development activities under way in connection with their youth programs. As will be apparent from reading the report, however, most of the Knowledge Development we found was at an early stage. This is, of course, understandable in light of the early dates -- fully a year ago -- at which the visits were made. The regional offices were just beginning to play a role in spreading the Knowledge Development initiative among their primes, and the Osoro training project was barely under way. Several of the regions seemed to be developing a good understanding of the KD concept; but, for the most part, information from the regional offices was rather sketchy. In some cases, Knowledge Development activities that looked good on paper and sounded good over the telephone either proved insufficiently advanced to yield results or fell through for one or another reason.

This is perhaps not surprising in view of the fact that MDC was pursuing an initiative that had not been defined and was not mandated in the strict sense of that word. Prime sponsors were left free to ignore Knowledge Development and some did. They were also free to create Knowledge Development plans on paper, and then never carry them out, and some did that too.

Generally, MDC found activity of one sort or another aimed at satisfying what seemed to both regional staff and state and local prime sponsors an extremely nebulous goal. What was Knowledge Development

supposed to mean, MDC observers were asked frequently, and how was one to go about getting it?

For internal purposes, MDC had decided upon a rough tentative definition of its own--what it thought Knowledge Development for youth programs, or any other CETA programs, ought to mean. It ought to mean, we thought, the collection of information under a plan intended to yield knowledge that may predictably be useful in improving CETA programs for youth.

We were prepared to alter the definition as we went along, to build on it, or to make it more precise, but we were more interested in how the prime sponsors and program operators were defining it and--if we could find out--why.

In this report we have tried to depict the various kinds of initiatives that have sprung up under the rubric of Knowledge Development. We are aware that some of the larger prime sponsors have evaluation systems which essentially provide to all programs--including youth programs--the benefits described in our definition of Knowledge Development. Since these systems preceded the youth act, and since most small or medium-sized prime sponsors would have difficulty replicating them, we did not concentrate on them.

We have tried, instead, to provide a good, close look at early Knowledge Development initiatives by a few prime sponsors. Our conclusions, however, and our recommendations for the future, are based on the work of the entire project, including our talks with regional staff, with Osoro, and our brief contact with prime sponsor efforts that did not seem likely to lead to the development of any particular knowledge beyond the recognition that learning anything can be hard work.

II. The Regional Perspective

After completing visits to the 10 regional DOL offices, MDC held a project briefing April 26-27, 1979, for its field research associates and members of the North Carolina Central University staff who were to prepare the abstracts. Staff members who had participated in the regional visits were asked what they had learned.

"They mainly asked us to tell them what we thought Knowledge Development was," one MDC staff person responded.

This summarization of the regional visits still seems as useful today as it did then. MDC staff was invariably asked by the regional youth coordinator, a federal representative, or some other regional staff to define Knowledge Development. The request was framed so as to suggest that since MDC had a contract from the Office of Youth Programs, it could speak for OYP. The experience made us feel a little like foreign emissaries asked to explain our government's intentions.

Without being coy, we tried to elicit definitions from our interrogators, as it was part of our study design to try to learn how KD was being perceived, first at the regional and then at the local level. When this approach failed -- as it often did -- we shared our private definition with them, not as "word" handed down from OYP but simply in terms of our own perceptions. Usually, regional staff accepted the definition as reasonable, if not definitive, and we moved on to other business.

But this did not mean that we were furnished examples, good or not so good, of Knowledge Development under our definition or another. In all,

MDC staff developed 62 nominations from the regions. This figure, however, does not accurately reflect the degree of understanding exhibited by the regional offices.

For one thing, the level of awareness about KD activities varied considerably among the regions. From three of the 10 regions we received no nominations. The majority of the nominations received were made largely on the basis of mention by prime sponsors in grant applications that a Knowledge Development activity of some kind was in progress.

In one office -- Region I -- we received full cooperation and perceived a quick and impressive grasp on the part of the appropriate officials of what the primes were doing and what might realistically be called Knowledge Development. We were received courteously in the other nine offices, but the amount of information we were able to gather about prime sponsor youth activities having to do with Knowledge Development ranged from modest to minimal.

In every regional office, we talked with the youth coordinator and in many cases with a number of the federal representatives for the primes that were nominated. In most regions, however, we had to go to the primes themselves by telephone to get a clearer idea of what was really going on.

Staff at a few of the regional offices seemed to think that Knowledge Development was any program directed toward some "special" target. We were given as nominations for exemplary Knowledge Development a program for dropouts, a program for pregnant teenagers, and a program for handicapped youth. In none of these cases had any formal or informal method been determined for gleaning specific lessons. Knowledge Development here, then, was viewed not as a process but as a specific program design

or programmatic content of some sort. If it is "new" -- so this reasoning would seem to go -- then it must be Knowledge Development.

We sensed that most regional offices felt that they had been supplied with little that would help them answer the question of what Knowledge Development was supposed to be.

This may explain why we were not able to get the kind of information we had hoped to get from the regional offices. Our study plan called for simply turning over the nominations to the N.C. Central staff for winnowing down to the 25 three-page abstracts. But where there were few or no nominations from the regional offices, MDC staff developed this basic information on the phone with the prime sponsors themselves.

In this process, we discovered early on that what various prime sponsors were doing in the name of Knowledge Development frequently bore little resemblance to what they said they would do in their plans. Sometimes this discovery cast light on the level of understanding of Knowledge Development at a particular regional office.

A case here may be illustrative:

In one regional office, the MDC staff member was told by the regional youth coordinator that no nominations had been obtained from the field. This youth coordinator clearly had made an effort to obtain self-nominations and had been unsuccessful--he showed the MDC staff member the memorandum he had distributed to all primes. (The memorandum, itself, was interesting in that it called for primes which had "model" programs to nominate themselves, a declaration that most primes might be disinclined to make).

In view of the lack of self-nominations, he suggested that the MDC staff member visit with several of the federal representatives to the primes, located in that same building. He was extremely helpful in introducing our man to these individuals who, in turn, were as helpful as they could be in suggesting which prime sponsors might have "something going" in KD.

One federal representative seemed especially well informed about prime sponsor activity, including a good bit that was not in her area of week-by-week contact. She suggested some likely programs, and the regional youth coordinator agreed. Later the coordinator nominated two of these prime sponsors, and they were duly the object of abstracts and site visits.

When our N.C. Central researcher reported on the first of these in his abstract, he referred to the program as "diamond in the rough" KD. When the MDC staff member assigned to visit the prime sponsor arrived, it became clear what that phrase meant. The prime sponsor was running apparently good programs but had no plan to gather knowledge about them, no evaluative scheme of any sort. What this prime sponsor needed was help in getting started on Knowledge Development so that he might provide evidence of the apparent success of his programs and learn how to make them work even better for the participants.

One way or another, MDC staff gathered sufficient information to provide its subcontractor with leads for the telephone survey. Based on information collected in this way, the subcontractor winnowed down the nominations to provide 25 abstracts. MDC staff chose nineteen of these--all that seemed likely to repay further investigation--for site visits.

III. The Prime Sponsor Perspective

Developing Knowledge about Knowledge Development

Confusion about Knowledge Development is one thing at the regional level, at a significant remove from program operation; it is something else again at the prime sponsor level, where it is translated into program action or, as was at times the case, inaction.

It is known that some prime sponsors did little or nothing at all initially about Knowledge Development. While the prime sponsors chosen by the regions for this project were supposed to be outstanding examples, comparisons with other primes MDC is familiar with suggest that the study primes were, at best, average. If this is the case, the average prime sponsor made some efforts in fiscal 1978--however faltering--to fulfill the Knowledge Development mandate.

Among the 19 primes visited, initial responses to the announcement that a Knowledge Development section would be required for their youth plans varied sharply.

In Atlanta, the prime sponsor's youth planner perceived Knowledge Development as "nothing new." Rather, as our field research associate noted: "The youth planner saw KD as a new name for what they were doing and would have continued to do without the directive from the national office."

Staff members of the prime sponsor in Clark County (Wash.), on the other hand, were quite vocally disturbed about the manner in which the KD mandate came down to them. According to that prime's youth

planner, he had only a month to find out what Knowledge Development was and to design a proposal incorporating it. He also pointed out that, during the harried month, he could get no guidance, clarification, or technical assistance from either the regional or the national office.

In Richmond, Calif., the new initiative also seemed overwhelming. "We were totally dismayed," the youth planner recalled. "We're a small town--our total allocation is only $6 million--and we had no money for research. Our goal was and still is to spend as much of our money as possible on direct services to youth." The feeling here seemed to be that efforts at evaluation could be undertaken only with a commensurate loss in service. Yet despite this attitude, the Richmond prime sponsor managed to conduct one of the better Knowledge Development ventures MDC examined.

The wide difference in perceptions between Atlanta on the one hand and Richmond and Clark County on the other may have been as much a function of prime sponsor size as anything else. The larger primes tended either to be comfortable with the idea or to shrug it off as "nothing new." The smaller primes tended to be at a loss to know where to begin.

However confused they were, they could get little real guidance from the regional level. A couple of vignettes should point up this situation.

The Jackson-Josephine youth planner told MDC that neither he nor his superiors ever viewed KD as a "mandate." Rather, they saw it as an

optional suggested activity--one they were free to incorporate or ignore, as they saw fit. The planner noted that there was no new money to help foster KD, and that there were no discernible "rewards" for the extra effort that would be necessary to plan, operate, and track a KD effort. Still, he diligently checked out his perceptions with the youth staff at his regional office. He describes that attempt:

> "I called my Fed Rep to ask what Knowledge Development was. He said he didn't know. That was that. End of conversation."

The Montana B-O-S experience was similar to that of Jackson-Josephine. When the Montana state prime called the regional office to find out what Knowledge Development was and how to proceed, it got something less than a clear response from the federal representative. After some scratching of their heads, the prime's planners decided to put effort into an approach which appears too limited statistically to have much value.

This last is not to say that what Montana tried to do was useless programmatically, or even that some valuable information did not emerge. It is to say only that there was no <u>design</u> for learning, no systematic way of gathering information so as best to provide useful learnings.

Small wonder, really, when the dearth of evaluative practices of the average prime sponsor is taken into consideration. As it sifted through the regional suggestions, MDC found a number of primes who simply had not made the most basic distinction between doing something and learning something about what was being done. In a number of cases, Knowledge Development had been defined apparently as a "new program"--anything that had not been tried by that particular prime before. In

other cases, the KD concept spurred primes to attempt to serve new and significant segments of the target population, as though the knowledge they sought was to be developed in the heads of the new participants.

In yet other cases, information putatively related to KD was gathered, but in a willy-nilly fashion, with no clear idea of how it would be used. A prime sponsor told an MDC field research associate: "I've got batches of facts and figures. I've administered attitudinal, occupation, psychological tests." When asked to what purpose, he responded: "Hell, I don't know, but if you want to come down here, we'll develop any kind of knowledge you want."

The confusion extended, then, not just to what Knowledge Development was, but also to the matter of whom it was intended to help.

Too Much Mill, Too Little Grist

Even when prime sponsors understood that the knowledge to be developed was for their own benefit and that it must proceed from an examination of evidential data, other problems arose. After looking at dozens of abstracts and comparing notes on telephone surveys and site visits to primes, MDC believes that it can break these problems down into two essential types: First, there were the problems associated with too much structure to support altogether too little information.

It was surprising to see how many prime sponsors seized upon the classical outcome evaluation model, with or without comparison groups, for their Knowledge Development effort--or perhaps "exercise" would be the more appropriate word. MDC has concluded that many of these primes,

unaccustomed to performing evaluation, had simply adapted what seemed to them to be a standard national model to their local purposes.

A good example of this is the Montana B-O-S Knowledge Development activity which was designed around the summer youth program. The project was set up to measure four different combinations of services to determine which package was most effective in serving a population of school dropouts. The service combinations chosen entailed Work Experience by itself; Work Experience plus counseling; Work Experience with counseling emphasizing school return; and Work Experience combined with Career Awareness. All four of the service combinations were to be tested at each of four sites around the state, and each test site was to have a control group against which the progress of the four test groups would be compared.

On paper, and over the telephone, this looked and sounded like good, useful KD activity; it was carefully planned, sensibly staged, and appeared to have some very useful program learnings inherent in it.

But in actuality the project broke down: There was simply too much of a research-theory "mill" for too little informational grist.

Only 53 individual dropouts were enrolled in the project statewide--that is, about 14 at each of the four sites. Each of the four sub-groups at each site thus consisted of only three or four youth. Moreover, the control group for all four sites together was made up of only 19 individuals.

The samples, then, were simply too small to permit the drawing of any valid conclusions about the effectiveness of the several service mixes. To compound matters further, the project was put into place differently

at each of the four demonstration sites. And finally, the data collected on the "control group" was marred and incomplete.

The project ended in September of 1979. By winter of 1980, when MDC last checked with prime sponsor staff, no report of findings had yet been prepared. Given the numbers above, however, no one, unfortunately, need await the report with great anticipation.

We have singled out the Montana project as a clear example of the danger that arises in trying to learn and generalize from a narrow information base. Montana, sad to report, was far from being the only prime to make this fundamental error. Montana's project lends itself to illustration not because it accomplished so little in Knowledge Development, but rather because, with a sounder approach, it could have accomplished so much.

Relatedly, the use of control or comparison groups--an extremely risky technique when employed on a small scale--proved the undoing of other well-meaning prime sponsors.

Corpus Christi has done some interesting work involving comparison groups; but basic project orientation and the specifics of project implementation have all but vitiated the body of learnings that might have come from the experiment.

As part of the "ten percent income test experiment" conducted in 1979, Corpus Christi set up a project which, through a number of facets, would allow it to examine the question of whether CETA-eligible youth benefitted from interaction with youth from higher income, CETA-ineligible backgrounds.

Fifty-six young people were chosen for the project--one-half CETA-eligible youth, and one-half higher income youth. Then one-half

of each subgroup was assigned to one of the two area high schools--one the mainstream high school and the other an alternative education center.

Project staff hoped to use the comparison group situation to make judgments about the effects of factors such as age, sex, family income level, and education on youth employability. But after the project had been run, staff admitted that they had made but little progress towards the desired judgments. They concluded that they had, in effect, been looking at the wrong factors, and that matters such as personal motivation, role model exposure, and individual aspirations impinged more directly on employability than did the factors they set out to examine.

The project did produce one significant learning, even though it was in the nature of a side-effect: The CETA-eligible half of the group stayed in the program and progressed at about the same rate as the group of CETA-ineligible youth. Still, chances for the other important learnings were lost because of over-reliance on an improperly designed comparison format. Again, as with the Montana summer program, the research mechanism was far more complex and full-blown than the material that was fed into it.

A final note: The Corpus Christi project, which took on the trappings of a rather sophisticated Knowledge Development effort, was not really viewed by its operators as a KD effort at all. This became clear through conversations with the agency's youth planner, who stated: "The underlying reason for structuring an experimental research project

involving 56 youths was to gain more resources for the youth" [our emphasis]. We have, then, a rather interesting example of KD activity being undertaken for motives which had little to do with the desire to develop knowledge.

In several other cases, efforts at establishing elaborate formal evaluation systems have simply floundered, leaving the prime sponsor scrambling to snatch some sort of benefit from its efforts. The Fayette County, Pa., prime sponsor's effort illustrates the sort of rescue operation that some KD activities have turned into. The Fayette youth demonstration, funded at $324,000, was to consist of two tracks: an in-school counseling program for potential dropouts, and an out-of-school counseling, work experience, and remedial education track for dropouts. As written, the project plan was couched in terms of being a Knowledge Development undertaking: It was to include strong research and evaluation components. Learnings were to be generated about track-specific effectiveness through the use of control groups, pre- and post-program testing, and other measurement techniques.

The project looked good at the outset. Thirty youth had been enrolled, a number of employers had been reached, and job sites were being developed. The funding came through, and the KD aspects of the project went almost immediately to that region to which things go in handbaskets.

The youth staffer who had written the plan resigned without notice. The CETA director deliberated, decided to go on with the program, and hired a new youth director. First day on the job, this latter official reported to the prime's director that he ". . . could not find the Knowledge Development plan."

Nor, from that point onward, could any other observer. The program went forward, and in rather good fashion: 40 potential dropouts were enrolled in the in-school track, and 90 dropouts in the out-of-school component. Eventually, 83 of the youths either graduated or obtained their GED, and 30 young men and women were placed in private sector jobs.

But the KD elements, written so carefully into the original project plan, were not seen again. The entire control group mechanism was never instituted, and pre- and post-testing and other measurement devices were also abandoned.

The project, then, was a success operationally--young people were helped--but a bust insofar as effective KD is concerned. In an after-the-fact attempt to gain some sort of learning from the project, the prime commissioned an evaluation by an outside observer. That observer recalls:

> They called me in--in July or August--and told me: 'Write something.' It was like that.

His work did manage to salvage some learnings from the project--good reportage on the achievement of interinstitutional linkages, the administrative difficulties such linkages can engender, and so on. There was not, however, a great deal of hard, KD-type learning to salvage because the impetus which would have produced such learning was swallowed up early on by overriding operational considerations.

The implications of this sort of conceptual failure will be touched on in more depth later in this report. Still, we must at least mention

at this point our conviction that a strong infusion of technical assistance could have saved the Knowledge Development aspects of the Fayette County youth demonstration.

The Jackson-Josephine (Oregon) project affords yet another example of the dangers inherent in the comparison of small groups. In this case, we can see how participant attrition can expunge almost the last vestiges of usefulness from such comparisons.

Jackson-Josephine is in the enviable position of having a rather bullish labor market which allows the prime to place youths in jobs fairly easily. Because of this, the prime became interested in trying some new approaches and measuring them against traditional youth-job matching techniques. That is, Jackson-Josephine moved itself in the direction of Knowledge Development, whether or not it recognized the term.

The vehicle chosen by the sponsor was a vocational exploration program (VEP) for youths aged 16 to 19. The research aspects of the project centered on dividing participants into two groups and comparing progress and results. The youths in the first group were to be placed in private sector jobs; those in the second were to be assigned to a YCCIP unit.

This design struck MDC as a sensible one--one from which useful learnings about the effects of the two markedly different work environments could be extrapolated. The implementation of the design, however, in large part vitiated its potential usefulness.

The problem was, simply, one of scale. MDC learned that each of the two groups in the VEP experiment consisted initially of only

twenty youths. Any generalizations drawn from a two-group project with a membership of only 40 are perhaps automatically suspect. Unfortunately, they become even more suspect when membership dwindles to 12 in each group, as occurred in the Oregon project.

Here again, then, MDC has seen a commendable effort at Knowledge Development activity marred because of a fundamental mismatch between a research structure and the scope of data fed into the structure.

MDC has dwelt at some length on incidents of largely unsuccessful Knowledge Development attempts involving highly structured comparisons of relatively small groups because such incidents appear to represent an all-too-frequently pursued dead-end in the first two years of youth program Knowledge Development. A large number of prime sponsors--possibly trying to follow what they took to be a suggestion from Washington--applied the comparison technique to two small groups, one consisting of CETA-eligibles and the other of a mix of CETA-eligibles and higher income participants.

The issue of whether programs work better with CETA-eligibles only or with eligibles "mainstreamed" with non-eligibles is an appropriate question for national evaluation. The likelihood of determining so difficult an issue through local studies of small groups of youths, however, is not high. Even under the best of conditions, results are likely to be ambiguous. The exercise simply has a low probability of providing useful information for local program purposes, and that probability dwindles as a predictable percentage of participants drop out of the groups being compared.

Very Small Mills, Indeed

The second essential group of problems MDC believes it has identified among primes attempting KD is associated with the use of little or no structure for evaluation. In these cases, a certain amount of information was gathered, much of it potentially useful; but ultimate learnings were severely limited by the lack of forethought exercised.

An example of this mode is Dennison, Texas, where MDC was referred to a high school potential dropout program operated through the local Council of Government.

There, the subjects were a group of youths who had, except for an occasional visit to the high school, already dropped out. The prime sponsor, working through regular school personnel, organized a special class for these young people. The class spent half of each day in the school, working on academic and motivational subjects with a special instructor/counselor. During the second half of the day, the class functioned as a work crew performing park clean-up and similar tasks. Members were paid the minimum wage for their work.

After talking with the instructor and a number of the youths involved in this program, MDC's observer concluded that the effort was first-rate, that the instructor had established rapport with the youths, and that the project had managed to turn a number of potential and actual dropouts into achievers.

But what knowledge was generated from this program? Is it only that the right kind of instructor (or supervisor) can motivate youth to succeed where others would fail? And that the "right" kind of instructor

was one who showed that he cared what happened to them? ("How come you care so much about how I do in school," one of the youths asked this instructor, "when my daddy doesn't?")

These are not idle learnings, but yet rudimentary ones, of the sort that program operators have been assimilating over the years without benefit of statistical proof. Knowledge Development in such a program ought ideally to try to isolate factors that make the program succeed--the relative value of the screening process for program participants, curriculum, the work experience aspect, etc.

At the least, a participant questionnaire or--better yet--a thoughtful, detailed exit interview followed by a compilation and analysis of results could have proved extremely useful in such a program. A small program is at a disadvantage when it attempts to project generalizable learnings of a statistical nature, as we have observed; but it has a distinct advantage over larger programs in that the entire program group can participate in interviewing and can be examined through follow-up for program impact.

Too many prime sponsors seem to have ignored the opportunity of learning directly from participants, possibly because they thought of this kind of information as being "soft."

MDC found another example in which a KD effort was hampered by the lack of formal structure in a program of the Escambia County (Fla.) prime sponsor. The program involved the provision of employment-related services to approximately 30 mentally retarded but educable CETA-eligible young people.

At the outset, the project included no identifiable mechanisms for information gathering and no staff for performance assessment. This may have resulted at least partly from the hurry-up start the project had, since it was funded in part by an allocation directly from the office of the Governor.

Whatever the reason, once the project was under way, staff realized its informational shortcomings. To help correct them, an attempt was made to collect impressions of the program from participants and project supervisors. The avowed goal of this attempt was to produce feedback which would be useful in future planning.

The attempt, however, was carried out only sporadically, and without the firm underpinning a fairly formal questionnaire survey methodology would have furnished. Thus, while staff did form some impressionistic opinions about possible project improvements, the lack of a structured approach to data acquisition and analysis kept this KD effort from being more than marginally useful.

As a final example of knowledge lost because of loose structure, MDC would cite briefly the multi-purpose youth employment center operated by the Montgomery (Ala.) prime sponsor.

The basic thrust of the Youth Center is not job placement as such, but rather employability assessment and pre-employment assistance. Each young person who enters the Center goes through a rigorous assessment and testing program, the results of which guide the formulation of individual career development plans. The career development plan details the specific sorts of assistance the individual

youth needs to become job-ready: additional literacy training, counseling, work experience, or whatever.

The Center is an undertaking of some magnitude. At the time of MDC's site visit, approximately 700 young people had been referred to it by ESC and the prime's own intake office. Yet the Center has produced practically no documentation; there has apparently been no systematic assessment of the various services provided by the center, and statistics in even such basic areas as different types of participant terminations are sketchy.

It is not that the Center's staff do not recognize the need for a more structured approach to Knowledge Development activity. Rather, it is a matter of operational considerations overriding learning opportunities. There is also the element of need for help in designing and implementing a learning framework for the project. The Center's planner, in fact, voiced a direct request for technical assistance to MDC's observer during the latter's site visit.

Some Indications of a Better Match Between Mill and Grist

The Clark County (Wash.) prime sponsor is one of several which has done a pretty good job of matching up its analytical framework and informational input with respect to KD activities--this despite the aforementioned time bind in which it operated.

Initially, the prime planned two KD efforts--one as a component of its YETP in-school program, and one as part of its out-of-school youth project.

Because of operational difficulties, the in-school segment never flew. The one-month lead time simply did not enable the planners to impose a workable administrative structure for a program involving 9 schools. Moreover, due to differences in the funding year and school year calendars, project staff had to try to implement a new program in the midst of an ongoing semester, and the resultant scheduling difficulties were never overcome.

The out-of-school effort went more smoothly. This project centered on the school-to-work transition and set out to assess whether youth would be helped more by a combination of transition services (classroom and OJT training, career orientation, and work experience) than by a single service (traditionally, work experience alone). According to project staff, a number of measurement techniques were written into the program: pre- and post-project occupational awareness tests, unsubsidized job placement rates, entry wage levels, and participant evaluation through interviews.

Much of this measurement grid was never instituted, whatever the reason. Outcome assessment was carried out, but through much more informal means than the plan had set forth. Project staff ended up monitoring placement rates, wage levels, nature of employment, and job attendance rates for program graduates.

Even this reduced assessment mechanism, however, led to an important and program-related learning: The young people who received the new, comprehensive transition services package showed a higher positive termination rate, a higher job placement rate, and higher starting wages

than had the youths who had participated previously in the single service, work experience model.

That, it seems to MDC's observers, is a pretty sound piece of Knowledge Development, even though the technical aspects of its production were less than academically pure.

MDC would also list Yakima, Wash., among the prime sponsors who seem to be doing a fair job of matching up research structure and information handling in their KD effort.

Perhaps the best procedural lesson to be learned from Yakima's experience is that the prime there selected a simple KD-oriented question to try to answer and adopted a straightforward method for seeking that answer.

Schematically, here is the picture:

--The prime posited an item of "received wisdom":

A major factor in the unemployment of youth is their lack of hope at being able to get a job.

--The prime asked a question:

Is that statement valid?

--The prime subcontracted for a survey by questionnaire to answer its question.

The questionnaire was administered to every young person who applied for enrollment in the local YETP over a number of months. Approximately 325 questionnaires were completed. The document included some adjunct items, but the key question was this:

What do you feel about your chances of entering and staying in the business world, and why?

Interestingly, less than 3 per cent of the respondents answered that they considered their chances "poor." Fifty-one percent felt that their chances were "average," and 46 per cent characterized their chances as "good."

The very simplicity of this KD exercise might lead some observers to write it off. They might argue: Surely, anything so unsophisticated cannot really be valid Knowledge Development. MDC would not agree with that position. Admittedly, the procedure was simple. Still, it bears the hallmarks of true KD: It produced and documented new information, and the information has relevance for future program development. [It would be less than smart, for example, in view of the questionnaire responses, for Yakima to include a major "overcoming negative self-image and feelings of incompetence" component in its future youth employment activities.]

An interesting and slightly different application of numerical data as a tool for Knowledge Development can be seen in operation in the youth program of Richmond, Calif. The difference is probably directly attributable to the project director's somewhat idiosyncratic conceptualization of Knowledge Development, which she views in the context of " . . . something competitive, [a way of] seeing whether certain services to the target group make a difference."

The Richmond Youth Employment and Training Program has an enrollment of approximately 150 youths. All of the clients have either dropped out of school or are potential dropouts; over half are offenders, and there

are also sizable components of unwed mothers and handicapped youth. The client group is spread among all 7 of Richmond's high schools, but the largest contingent--65, or 43 per cent--attends the special "continuation" high school, where the entire student body consists of "troubled" youth.

The initial philosophical stance of the project's staff was, unabashedly, that of service providers. They saw themselves as helpers of seriously disadvantaged youth through the provision of work experience opportunities and counseling and placement services.

Once the program was under way, however, the director began making some comparisons among program clients and non-clients. She began, in her opinion, to look at Knowledge Development matters. The basic matrix of comparison was the performance of the YETP enrollees at the continuation high school as opposed to the performance of the rest of the student body.

The comparison showed that, for the school year ending in 1978, only 34 per cent of the non-client population either graduated or remained in school with passing grades. On the other hand, <u>every one</u> of the 65 YETP enrollees either graduated or returned to school the following year, and all of the latter group maintained passing grades. And there were good specifics within the overall good numbers set:

--Of the 8 unwed mothers enrolled, 4 graduated and 4 returned to school the next year.

--Of the 9 enrollees with records, none was involved in serious problems with the law while in the program.

--Eleven handicapped youths from the program were helped to get and hold wage-paying jobs for the first time in their lives.

The Richmond effort was, then, a demonstrably effective program; its KD elements, though interesting, were quite rudimentary. This appears to be the case because of two factors which MDC also saw in operation in many other site studies: The KD effort was tacked on, and it was stopped short.

The program was undertaken with no integral research design built in. The basic numerical analyses that were performed were added later, when the obviously competent staff stood away from service delivery long enough to realize that some sort of outcome assessment was necessary. It is thus not surprising that the production and use of statistical information was very simple.

Relatedly, it is not surprising that the statistical analysis stopped at a very early point. The numbers showed that the youth in the special program performed better than non-program youth, and that was left to be that. Perhaps real Knowledge Development would have come only with the next logical step in analysis (a step not yet taken by Richmond): What was there in the treatment given the project youth that caused or helped them to perform better than the other young people?

This, of course, is the kind of question all KD efforts must address if progress is to be made. Once again, MDC would point out its strong belief that Richmond would be a good deal farther along that particular KD trail if MDC--or somebody--had been able to help them, rather than just interviewing them.

A good example of how fairly basic interviewing and statistical techniques can be used to provide a somewhat more sophisticated level

of Knowledge Development than Richmond's can be found in the San Antonio, Texas, programs operated by the Bexar County Labor Community Agency (an arm of the city's AFL-CIO Council).

BCLCA's programs feature the programmatic interaction of handicapped with non-handicapped youth and are structured so as to produce learnings about this admixture. In its Fiscal 1978 Summer Youth Employment Program, the organization utilized pre- and post-testing and interviewing techniques--first to compare attitudes about the world of work and the handicapped and to develop self-image profiles; and second to get in-depth participant and counselor evaluations of the program itself. A number of program changes were made as a result. "Among other things," the program director told us, "we found that pairing a handicapped with a non-handicapped youth didn't always work. We were a little disappointed with that, but we also realized that we had done it somewhat hastily."

The Fiscal 1979 SYEP involved 170 participants, of whom 103 were classified as minimally handicapped and 67 as non-handicapped. All participants received 24 hours of orientation, three hours a week of counseling, and a total of 240 hours of work experience.

This time program staff took care with the pairing of the handicapped and non-handicapped youth, not doing it as a matter of course, but only when it seemed suitable both from the standpoint of the work and of the youths involved. Both counselors and participants expressed heightened satisfaction with the technique in post-program interviews. Where only 67 per cent had found it satisfactory in 1978, 80 per cent found it satisfactory the following summer, and these results reflected the

perceptions of top project staff. A probable ancillary benefit of the interviewing process was the increased awareness on the part of counselors of the ability of handicapped youth to hold full-time jobs (91 per cent compared to Fiscal 1978's 67 per cent).

The learning here is but one of a number gained from careful, structured use of questionnaire and interviewing techniques--others included the knowledge that the orientation session was boring and unnecessary to a number of the participants and needed either to be re-structured or made optional; and that the three-hour weekly counseling sessions were too long for most participants and should be reduced--at their suggestion--to two hours.

In its YETP program for Fiscal 1979, BCLCA mixed 42 minimally handicapped graduating seniors with 62 non-handicapped graduating seniors in a program consisting of orientation, skills training, and jobs. The knowledge development function was structured to test the worth of an Adult Performance Level component (basic life skills--i.e. government, economics, child care). Half of a representative random mix of handicapped and non-handicapped youth were assigned to the APL and the other half to a consumer education activity. It was also structured to compare in 30-60-90 day followups the placement and sticking rate of the handicapped to the non-handicapped participants.

Results seemed to indicate that the APL component is worthwhile. At 30-day followup, 82 per cent of the APL non-handicapped group were on the job, compared to 33 per cent of the non-APL group; 65 per cent of the APL handicapped group were positive, compared to 27 per cent of the non-APL handicapped group.

The comparison of positive terminations between the handicapped and non-handicapped groups is more difficult to weigh. At the end of the 30-day followup, non-handicapped positive terminations were at 90 per cent, while handicapped positive terminations were at 61 per cent. Is this a good positive termination level for handicapped? Program staff are not sure--"in fact, we want to see the results of the longer term followups before we get very excited about even the non-handicapped rate," one said. At any rate, a handicapped positive termination rate at least has been established for future comparisons with other similar programs and with programs for the handicapped only.

In effect, then, Bexar County has taken some fairly basic tools and produced good early learnings that have, in turn, been plugged immediately back into the program design and operation process. The sophistication of the devices employed may well have been limited; but the results generated and the application of those results are, most emphatically, embraceable under the rubric of Knowledge Development.

And Some Further Indications with a Firm Maybe

Here and there, MDC has found some other second-year KD activities which have not yet yielded solid results, but which may prove instructive in the future. Brief treatments of several of these follow.

The St. Louis prime sponsor set itself a rather impressive youth program Knowledge Development docket for 1979. The work was to be carried out by St. Louis University's Center for Urban Programs and was to entail the monitoring of implementation issues and the provision of impact evaluation for 5 YETP programs mounted by the prime.

Among the KD-related matters to be addressed were the following:

--Organization of YETP projects. How are the projects organized? What differences inhere in the 12-month approach as opposed to the school-year approach?

--Selection of participants. What groups of youth are served? How are they recruited and selected?

--Provision of services. What mechanisms are used to select services matched to desired program outcomes?

--Private sector participation. What techniques were used to encourage private sector involvement? What sort of work sites and experiences resulted?

--Coordination. How were YEDPA activities meshed with other existing youth programs?

The basic methods of addressing these questions will be ongoing site visits and interviews with project personnel.

Because of scheduling problems, the sponsor and the subcontractor both realized that the learnings from this KD effort would be of only minimal use in the FY 1980 program design process. However, all the principals feel that the knowledge developed will be applied extensively to program planning, designing, and funding decisions for FY 1981.

The San Francisco prime sponsor, according to its director of youth programs, is constantly engaged in some form of KD activity, and has been for a number of years. Of course, that statement reveals something of that particular official's construction of the term "Knowledge Development," which he expounded on to MDC's observer:

> KD isn't really all that new a thing. Back in the early '60's, the Labor Department and the Ford Foundation funded an experimental Youth Opportunities Center, which grouped the activities of about 10 agencies. They called it a 'Knowledge Development Pilot Project.'

His further conversation showed that he held KD to be synonymous with any innovative program approach, and with research in general. It is perhaps also significant that, in his memory, a major outcome of the "KD Pilot Project" had been the conviction that it is difficult to combine an action program with a research project, " . . . since the latter keeps getting in the way of the former."

The most interesting locus of San Francisco's KD efforts has probably been the twenty per cent set-aside "special projects", which the prime has carried on for three summers now. At the sponsor's own admission, it has not attempted to do any "sophisticated research" in these projects. But the projects do qualify as KD efforts, under the prime's view of the concept, since their basic tenet has been to try out innovative approaches to youth programming. In several cases, these new summer techniques have seemed successful enough so that they have been added on to regular, school-year CETA youth programming.

Perhaps the three major contributions of the KD-oriented special projects have been these:

--The prime has learned that innovative summer programs can attract and enroll youth who were not drawn to the ongoing, regularized school-year programs.

--The prime has learned that a program featuring a mix of services (job readiness, literacy upgrading, career orientation) can serve certain youths better than a one-track (usually work experience) project.

--The prime has learned to identify CBOs which have the expertise necessary for providing services to the most severely disadvantaged and handicapped youth.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the prime and the regional DOL office have been at loggerheads over the special projects since their inception. Prime staff state that regional officials have never been comfortable with the innovative features of the special projects, fearing that these features, in several ways, bend the regulations regarding eligibility and allowable activities.

Because of this, the San Francisco staff feels federal staff should stay out of the Knowledge Development arena, letting the local primes go it alone. "If the Feds had it their way," said a staffer, "the special projects program would have been disallowed, and our Knowledge Development initiative would have been reduced accordingly."

The Atlanta prime sponsor cites as a major KD effort a progression of events which adds yet another nuance to the overall story of the KD concept: Knowledge Development as a firefighting tool.

Atlanta's 1978 summer youth program was in deep trouble. Those were the hectic days of "fraud" and "abuse" headlines, and the Atlanta program--whether or not deservedly--came in for more than its share of them.

The prime took a courageous path in the face of these problems--a path it feels led to considerable Knowledge Development. It called in an outside evaluator to look at its entire youth programming effort.

The evaluator evaluated and, by fall, submitted a detailed final report containing 38 specific recommendations to the prime's Planning

Council. The Council assigned the report to a subcommittee for review and assessment, and the press and some segments of the public smirked knowingly, "Well, that's that."

But it was not.

The subcommittee worked over the report in a series of meetings lasting from October of 1978 through May of 1979. In addition to the evaluator's report, it reviewed staff papers, citizen complaints, and its own observation about the previous summer's youth program.

In early summer of 1979, the subcommittee put forth and the full Planning Council endorsed a slate of recommendations which called for a major overhaul of the summer youth program. The following excerpts from the subcommittee's report indicate the broad scope of the slate of recommendations:

--Change to a centralized administration and a centralized payroll.

--Make provisions for administrative assessment and process analysis of the program and individual projects throughout the summer. (During the first weeks of the 1979 summer program, staff spent the first hour of each day in process evaluation.)

--Develop new procedures and instruments for work site monitoring. (In 1979, staff for the first time did written evaluations of work sites and scheduled regular meetings with work site supervisors.)

--Change to a centralized recruitment and intake certification and referral procedure to increase participation among target groups.

The Planning Council's recommendations were not merely acknowledged by the prime, but acted upon. The '79 summer youth program was redesigned, and it operated in a relatively trouble-free manner. Knowledge Development was hailed as a saver of bacon. MDC hopes that the prime will go on from there to the realization that KD, once institutionalized, can also serve to prevent situations in which bacon-saving becomes necessary.

* * * *

With the site visits finished, we had to ask ourselves whether there was reason to change our original view of what Knowledge Development ought to be--the collection of information in some planned fashion to develop learnings useful in program design or operation.

We could see no reason to alter that definition, but we had reason to examine more closely with the benefit of experience what form that knowledge might take.

The form can be rudimentary, as in the case of the Yakima learning that the youth they are serving do not have built-in expectations of failure. This may not seem like a great learning but it did come as a surprise to the prime sponsor.

It can be somewhat more developed, as in the case of Richmond County where statistics reinforce the value of the program but do not provide much insight into the why's and wherefores. It would be a mistake to underestimate the morale value of statistical support for the value of the program and encouragement to make improvements in the

program. "It's great to have real evidence that you're getting your act together," as one prime sponsor director said.

It can be rather more substantive without being fully developed. The San Antonio SYEP Knowledge Development function already has yielded valuable information which has been put to good use in program re-design. Further efforts at pre- and post-testing and interviewing may bring further progress. Further follow-up on the YETP program described here could lead to a program mixing handicapped and non-handicapped youths to the optimal advantage of both groups.

It should be clear that MDC found no CETA prime sponsors with what could be described as fully articulated Knowledge Development plans. That is hardly surprising, given the fact that the function of Knowledge Development in youth programs is only two years old.

It may be more useful to observe--because it is also true--that we found a number of prime sponsors at various stages of experimentation with Knowledge Development approaches. And we found others who were already beginning to log knowledge, who had proceeded far enough down the line to begin to learn more about how well their programs work and how to improve them.

The big question remaining is how to build on the beginnings. With approximately 460 CETA prime sponsors in the field, how can Knowledge Development be stimulated? How can it be seeded where it does not now exist? How can those who have begun get assistance in continuing?

IV. Summary and Recommendations

As a result of the work done under this contract, including contact with regional offices and brief exposure to prime sponsors who are not engaged in Knowledge Development, as well as with those whose efforts are reported here, it is possible to make several general observations:

--There is no common definition of Knowledge Development anywhere--no general agreement at all on what it is or how it is to be achieved.

--There is limited activity under the rubric of Knowledge Development in youth programs operated by prime sponsors around the country--more in Fiscal 1979 than in Fiscal 1978, but not much by any standard of measurement.

--If the OYP's goal for local Knowledge Development is to create ferment at the prime sponsor level--casting about for lessons worth learning even at the cost of initial confusion--progress can be reported. If the goal, however, is to spur prime sponsors to evaluation of youth programs for management decision-making purposes, much work remains to be done.

--Despite limited progress, the average prime sponsor is interested in learning more about its youth programs so that they can be improved, and would welcome advice, examples, and technical assistance in any form in which it might be offered.

This last point deserves underscoring. MDC staff and field associates found everywhere a willingness on the part of prime sponsors to get into Knowledge Development--as they understood it. In the case of those who had not accomplished much, there was a sense of frustration and often a tendency to blame regional and national officials for not offering more definition and help.

Clark County's unhappiness with the time frame in which its KD effort was squeezed did not prevent it from getting something under way, but a lack of technical assistance probably foredoomed that effort. Jackson-Josephine's federal representative undoubtedly was being honest when he told the prime sponsor that he didn't know what Knowledge Development was, but it is hardly likely that the implications of his answer spurred the prime sponsor on to greater efforts.

Even those who had literally nothing in the way of a KD effort often had been gathering for some time the kind of information that could be used for one. The prime sponsor in Texas with all the tests and the willingness to "develop all the knowledge you want" was in need, first, of a definition, and then, of some rudimentary assistance to get something started.

Where KD of a limited sort had been gained, it was often relatively easy to see how more of a useful sort could have been gained with little extra effort. The learning in Yakima that program participants did not have negative expectations in the job market was fine as far as it went, but a good deal more of value could have been learned in the same survey sampling. What Yakima lacked was a well-defined research plan designed to get the most out of the effort--more knowledge for the same bucks, so to speak.

These are all instances where a little sound advice, a few hours or days of counseling would have been enormously helpful. Not surprisingly, as we get to the primes where a bit more was learned, a more considerable effort may be required to provide commensurate help.

An example here is Richmond, Calif., where the operator proved rather convincingly that her program was helping dropout youth, but had built in no research design intended to tell her why. Creating such a design is no simple matter--learning "why" is almost always more difficult than learning "what"--but it is not beyond the reach of even the smallest prime sponsor working with others experienced in local program evaluation.

Working with certain more advanced prime sponsors affords the additional bonus of an opportunity to develop model systems of Knowledge Development. The San Antonio prime sponsor's efforts to learn how best to help handicapped and non-handicapped youth in mainstreamed programs is one that could conceivably have national importance. What San Antonio needs is a little encouragement, reasonably apt advice, and modest technical assistance. "Nothing big," as the subcontract director told MDC, "but a pat on the back and a helping hand we'd never turn down."

In addition to turning up a willingness of prime sponsors to work on Knowledge Development, this study provided an outline of the kind of assistance that is most needed in a variety of forms suitable for a variety of settings.

First, some firm definition of Knowledge Development as applicable to youth programs at the state and local level should be provided. We have no pride of authorship in our working definition: the collection

of information under a plan intended to yield knowledge that may predictably be useful in improving CETA programs for youth. Absent a better or more authoritative definition, we offer it for purposes of discussion.

Once KD is defined, prime sponsors need help in designing evaluation plans that are within the realm of accomplishment and that may reasonably be expected to provide knowledge useful to them. We would stress both the utility of the knowledge and the phrase "to them" with the conviction that only at the local level can decisions be made that effect program improvement.

Too often, MDC observed KD initiatives designed as though the knowledge to be gained would be useful to someone at the national level--or at least someone remote from the program scene. And too often, again, we saw KD initiatives that were either too fuzzily conceived to produce useful results or too ambitious to be carried out realistically.

The first rule of evaluation is to set goals that <u>can</u> be evaluated. Under these goals, quantifiable, measurable objectives must be ordered. In adapting this procedure to KD, the prime sponsor should ask itself: What are the specific learnings I intend to gain in this effort? Is the knowledge I am likely to get worth the effort I expect to have to make?

It seems clear to us that many if not most prime sponsors will need help in making the wisest possible decisions here. Whatever technical assistance is offered will have to take into account the teaching needs suggested here--and also the fact that the best teachers of program operators probably are other program operators.

To attempt a technical assistance effort intended to help everyone in the field would be extremely costly even assuming the teaching resources were available. A much more modest effort would seem to suggest itself:

—A certain amount of information should be circulated routinely through the regional offices to the prime sponsors in order to clarify how local KD is perceived nationally.

--Modest amounts of technical assistance should be provided to prime sponsors directly. This T/A should be granted on the basis of the willingness of the primes to set worthwhile and achievable KD goals and to put their own resources into the effort. It should be flexible, so as to permit the agency providing technical assistance freedom to put its T/A where it is likely to do the most good. It should be sufficient in scope to have a "seeding" impact nationally.

--A communications network should be erected so that prime sponsors can be helped initially to share their learnings in KD. Eventually, such a network ought to be built into the national-regional-local CETA structure for a variety of informational purposes.

--Regional workshops should be organized around the better KD efforts emerging as a result of the technical assistance. Here, relatively successful prime sponsors would provide a learning resource for other primes in their geographical

area, with the agency providing the T/A supervising and collating information. Care should be taken to involve the regional offices in this experience.

--Consideration should be given then to the convening of a national conference whose goals would be the further spread of major learnings and decisions about next steps.

It should not escape notice that the Knowledge Development effort for youth programs has critical implications for other CETA and non-CETA employment and training initiatives. However it is finally defined, KD seems clearly to be another way of describing local evaluation.

If it can be said--as we think it can--that the state of the art of KD reflects only scattered, unformed effort, not much more can be said of the average CETA prime sponsor's local evaluation effort, period. If KD were given a boost, it would almost certainly provide learnings useful in programs other than those designed exclusively for youth.

Even more important, the structure ultimately necessary to stimulate KD learnings, to spread the most useful of them--a process that could be called "knowledge sharing"--can be designed, and indeed should be designed, to support all of the knowledge that CETA program operators can develop.